

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
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AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
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AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 19808

TEL AVIV FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT UR US
SUBJECT: HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LEONID IL'ICH

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. BREZHNEV'S 70TH BIRTHDAY IS INTERESTING BOTH AS AN INDICATOR OF HOW FAR HE HAS COME SINCE HE REPLACED KHRUSHCHEV IN OCTOBER 1964, AND AS A POTENTIAL INDICATOR OF HIS FUTURE PLANS. ON THE FORMER SCORE, THE MEDIA ATTENTION AND COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS ACCORDED BREZHNEV ON HIS 70TH VASTLY EXCEEDED THOSE ACCORDED THE OTHERS IN THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP WHO HAVE CELEBRATED THEIR 70TH BIRTHDAYS (PEL'SHE, SUSLOV, PODGORNYY, KOSYGIN AND KIRILENKO)
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AND WERE SOMEWHAT MORE EXTENSIVE THAN THOSE CONNECTED WITH KRUSHCHEV'S 70TH IN APRIL 1964. THE PRAISE HEAPED ON BREZHNEV WAS RESTRAINED, HOWEVER: FOR EXAMPLE, THE PHRASE POLITBURO "HEADED BY" WAS NOT UNIFORMLY USED; THE PRINCIPLE OF "COLLECTIVITY" WAS FREQUENTLY MENTIONED; AND BREZHNEV WAS GENERALLY DESCRIBED AS HAVING MADE AN IMPORTANT CONTRI-

BUTION TO THIS OR THAT FIELD BUT WAS NOT PORTRAYED AS THE
SOLE ORIGINATOR OF POLICY. ON BREZHNEV'S FUTURE, ONE CAN
DETECT SMALL SIGNS THAT BREZHNEV MAY HAVE POLITICAL SUCCESSION
ON HIS MIND. THESE INCLUDE THE WAY IN WHICH BREZHNEV'S
HEALTH AND FUTURE WERE TREATED, PLUS EMPHASIS ON THE
CORRECTNESS OF HIS POLICIES AND THE VASTNESS OF HIS PRESTIGE.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE BUILD-UP TO DECEMBER 19. THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO
BREZHNEV'S 70TH BIRTHDAY SEEMED ORCHESTRATED TO KEEP HIS
NAME AND PICTURE IN FRONT OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE. FOR
EXAMPLE:

-- THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN BEGAN TO PICK UP STEAM ON
DECEMBER 11, WITH A TASS ANNOUNCEMENT OF PUBLICATION OF
LEONID IL'ICH'S SHORT BIOGRAPHY;

-- PRAVDA ON DECEMBER 12 CARRIED A LENGTHY REVIEW OF
BREZHNEV'S SPEECHES AND ARTICLES DEALING WITH PARTY WORK;

-- ON DECEMBER 13 WORLD PEACE COUNCIL HEAD ROMESH CHANDRA
LAUDED BREZHNEV IN PRAVDA;

-- THE FINALE IN PARADE OF EAST EUROPEAN (PLUS
MONGOLIAN, CUBAN, AND FINNISH) MEDALS COMMENCED ON
DECEMBER 13, WITH ONE AND SOMETIMES TWO HEAVILY PUB-
LICIZED AWARD CEREMONIES EACH DAY;

-- ON DECEMBER 14 PRAVDA AND OTHER PAPERS BEGAN
CARRYING COLOR PIECES ON VARIOUS ASPECTS OF BREZHNEV'S
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CAREER (STUDENT DAYS, WARTIME EXPLOITS, WHEAT GROWING
IN KAZAKHSTAN, ETC.);

-- THE DECEMBER ISSUES OF MOST SOVIET JOURNALS
INCLUDED PORTRAITS OF LEONID IL'ICH, AND SOME HAD
EDITORIALS DEVOTED TO HIS BIRTHDAY.

3. ON SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, THE MEDIA ANNOUNCED BREZHNEV'S
TWO FORMAL BIRTHDAY PRESENTS: A SECOND "HERO OF THE SOVIET
UNION" AWARD (INCLUDING AN ORDER OF LENIN AND A SECOND
GOLD STAR), AND A CEREMONIAL SWORD, AWARDED TO "GENERAL
SECRETARY OF THE CPSU CC, CHAIRMAN OF THE USSR DEFENSE
COUNCIL, MARSHAL OF THE SOVIET UNION L.I. BREZHNEV" FOR
"OUTSTANDING WORK IN STRENGTHENING THE DEFENSIVE ABILITY
OF THE COUNTRY AND PERFECTING THE ARMED FORCES OF THE USSR."
THESE ANNOUNCEMENTS, PLUS THE OFFICIAL BIRTHDAY MESSAGE
(FROM THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, SUPREME SOVIET, AND COUNCIL
OF MINISTERS) AND A LARGE PHOTO OF BREZHNEV, TOOK UP VIRTUALLY

ALL OF PRAVDA'S FIRST PAGE.

4. PRAVDA FOR DECEMBER 19 ALSO DEVOTED SIX INSIDE PAGES TO THE TEXTS OF BIRTHDAY GREETINGS SENT BY MAJOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE USSR (I.E., THE MOSCOW GORKOM, THE LENINGRAD OBKOM, THE VARIOUS REPUBLICS, THE MILITARY) AS WELL AS FROM ABROAD. PRESIDENT FORD'S MESSAGE WAS THE FIRST OF THREE GREETINGS SENT BY WESTERN LEADERS (SCHMIDT AND LEONE WERE THE OTHER TWO).

5. THE KREMLIN AWARD CEREMONY TOOK PLACE THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 19 AND WAS ATTENDED BY ALL THE CENTRAL PARTY LEADERSHIP, GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY LEADERS, PLUS EE, MONGOLIAN AND CUBAN LEADERS (YUGOSLAVIA APPARENTLY WAS NOT REPRESENTED, NOR WERE NORTH KOREA OR VIETNAM). FILM OF THE EVENT, WHICH INVOLVED A PRESENTATION SPEECH BY PODGORNYY AND BREZHNEV'S REPLY, WAS CARRIED ON SOVIET TV AND THE EE TELEVISION NETWORK "INTERVISION" LATE SUNDAY MORNING AND
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WAS REPEATED THAT EVENING. THE DAY ENDED WITH A HUGE KREMLIN RECEPTION ATTENDED BY THE FULL CENTRAL COMMITTEE, THE CENTRAL AUDITING COMMISSION, OBKOM AND KRAYKOM FIRST SECRETARIES, CP DIGNITARIES FROM ABROAD, PLUS SOVIET GOVERNMENT AND MILITARY LEADERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER MAJOR SPHERE OF SOVIET SOCIETY. SUSLOV DELIVERED THE KEYNOTE SPEECH, FOLLOWED BY GRISHIN, SHCHERBITSKIY, KUNAYEV, AND MANY OTHERS.

6. THE CONTENT OF THE PRAISE FOR BREZHNEV IN CONNECTION WITH HIS 70TH DID NOT SEEM TO ADVANCE THE "CULT OF BREZHNEV" BEYOND THE LEVEL REACHED DURING THE 25TH CONGRESS: OVERALL:

-- BREZHNEV FREQUENTLY WAS REFERRED TO AS HEADING THE POLITBURO OR THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE, BUT NOT ALWAYS; THE DECEMBER 12 PRAVDA BOOK REVIEW SPOKE OF THE ACTIVITY "OF THE CPSU, ITS CC, AND CC POLITBURO AND OF COMRADE L.I. BREZHNEV PERSONALLY"; PRAVDA COMMENTATOR YURIY ZHUKOV USED A SIMILAR FORMULATION DECEMBER 17, IN DISCUSSING BREZHNEV'S CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD PEACE;

-- BREZHNEV WAS PORTRAYED AS HAVING MADE MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO VARIOUS FIELDS OF ENDEAVOR, BUT HE WAS NOT DEPICTED AS THE SOLE ORIGINATOR OF BASIC POLICY; THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE AND POLITBURO WERE FREQUENTLY MENTIONED, AS WAS THE PRINCIPLE OF "COLLECTIVITY";

-- RUMORED ACCOLADES TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY DID NOT MATERIALIZE: HE WAS NOT MADE AN ACADEMICIAN; POEMS WERE NOT SUNG IN HIS PRAISE, AND LUIS CORVALAN WAS NOT

PRODUCED IN PERSON FOR THE BIRTHDAY PARTY, ALTHOUGH
PRAVDA DECEMBER 19 CARRIED A BIRTHDAY MESSAGE FROM CORVALAN
WHICH INDICATED HE WAS IN THE USSR ON THAT DAY (OF COURSE
HE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY UP TO ATTENDING THE
DECEMBER 19 FESTIVITIES).

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7. NONETHELESS, THE BIRTHDAY PROVIDED A CLEAR BENCHMARK
OF HOW FAR BREZHNEV HAS COME IN PERSONAL STANDING SINCE
HE REPLACED KHRUSHCHEV IN OCTOBER 1964. AS EARLIER REPORTED,
THE 70TH BIRTHDAYS OF FULL POLITBURO MEMBERS HAVE, SINCE
KHRUSHCHEV'S 70TH IN APRIL 1964, BEEN TREATED IN STANDARD
FASHION: A "HERO OF SOCIALIST LABOR" AWARD, FOLLOWED

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AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MOSCOW 19808

TEL AVIV FOR AMBASSADOR

BY A BRIEF KREMLIN AWARD CEREMONY. BREZHNEV'S 70TH OBVIOUSLY DWARFED THIS PATTERN AND SEEMS EVEN TO HAVE SURPASSED KHRUSHCHEV'S 70TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, WHICH DID NOT INVOLVE AN EXTENSIVE PRE-BIRTHDAY MEDIA BUILD-UP, OR PUBLICATION OF HIGH-LEVEL GREETINGS FROM WITHIN THE SOVIET UNION, OR PRESENTATION OF A CEREMONIAL SWORD IN CONNECTION WITH KHRUSHCHEV'S MILITARY ACTIVITIES. LEONID IL'ICH'S 70TH BIRTHDAY THUS SERVES TO ILLUSTRATE HIS RISE FROM A GRAY PARTY APPARATCHIK IN OCTOBER 1964 -- WHEN KOSYGIN SEEMED TO BE THE CHIEF SPOKESMAN FOR FOREIGN POLICY AS WELL AS FOR DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AFFAIRS-- TO A PREEMINENT LEADERSHIP STATUS WHICH IS APPROACHED BY NO OTHER MEMBER

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OF THE POLITBURO.

9. THE INTRIGUING QUESTION IS WHERE BREZHNEV PLANS TO GO FROM HERE: ONWARD UNTIL HIS HEALTH FAILS, A LA STALIN; OR UNTIL HE IS FINALLY REMOVED FROM OFFICE, A LA KHRUSHCHEV? OR DOES HE PRESENT HAVE IN MIND SOME PLAN FOR POLITICAL SUCCESSION WHICH MIGHT, FOR EXAMPLE, INVOLVL QQ REMACC HL THE ULTIMATE ARBITER OF POLICY AND PERSONNEL MATTERS. IT WOULD BE OUR ASSUMPTION THAT SOME OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS MIGHT PROMPT BREZHNEV TO THINK SERIOUSLY ABOUT SUCCESSION:

-- KOSYGIN'S RECENT INDISPOSITION, PLUS THE DEATHS OF GRECHKO AND YAKUBOVSKIY;

-- KNOWLEDGE THAT HIS OWN PHYSICAL HEALTH IS LESS THAN PERFECT;

-- A DESIRE TO PERPETUATE HIS POLICIES;

-- AND PERHPAS A DESIRE TO GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS THE FIRST SOVIET LEADER TO BRING OFF AN ORDERLY, "RESPECTABLE" POLITICAL SUCCESSION.

10. IN THIS LIGHT, SEVERAL DETAILS OF LEONID IL'ICH'S 70TH MAY BE OF SIGNIFICANCE, ALTHOUGH THE EVIDENCE IS INCONCLUSIVE AT BEST. FIRST, IN ALL OF THE SOVIET ARTICLES AND SPEECHES CONNECTED WITH HIS BIRTHDAY, LITTLE HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT BREZHNEV'S CURRENT HEALTH AND FUTURE PLANS (ALTHOUGH INDIVIDUAL FOREIGN GREETINGS DID MENTION HIS GOOD HEALTH). FOR EXAMPLE:

-- DURING THE DECEMBER 19 AWARD CEREMONY, PODGORNY NOTED THAT BREZHNEV WAS "FULL OF CREATIVE ENERGY" BUT SAID NOTHING ELSE ABOUT THE GENERAL SECRETARY'S PHYSICAL CONDITION;

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-- IN REPLY, BREZHNEV (UNLIKE KHRUSHCHEV IN 1964 AND IN CONTRAST TO KIRILENKO ON HIS 70TH BIRTHDAY) WAS SILENT ABOUT HEALTH AND AGING, AND WITH REFERENCE TO THE FUTURE PLEDGED TO FOLLOW LENIN'S TEACHINGS AND ALWAYS TO REMAIN "A TRUE SOLDIER OF THE PARTY";

-- IN RESPONDING TO RAUL CASTRO'S AWARD OF THE "BAY OF PIGS" MEDAL DECEMBER 15, BREZHNEV USED AN ODD FORMULATION: "I WANT TO ASSURE YOU THAT THE CPSU, THE SOVIET PEOPLE-- AND WITH THEM, OF COURSE, TO THE EXTENT OF HIS STRENGTH, LEONID IL'ICH BREZHNEV--WILL CONTINUE TO DO EVERYTHING" TO STRENGTHEN SOVIET-CUBAN FRIENDSHIP.

11. SECONDLY, THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BIRTHDAY EMPHASIZED REPEATEDLY THE CORRECTNESS OF CURRENT SOVIET POLICY, AS WELL AS THE GREAT ESTEEM WITH WHICH BREZHNEV IS REGARDED IN THE SOVIET UNION AND ABROAD. FOR EXAMPLE:

-- IN HIS PRESENTATION SPEECH, PODGORNYY SPOKE OF THE "CORRECTNESS OF PARTY POLICY, THE VITALITY OF THE PATH WE ARE FOLLOWING" (TO WHICH TASS ADDED, IN PARENTHESES, "APPLAUSE", WHILE THE TV REPLAY LEFT NO DOUBT THERE WAS IN FACT NO APPLAUSE AFTER THESE WORDS);

-- IN REPLY, BREZHNEV SAID THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR HIM WAS THE TRUST OF THE PARTY AND PEOPLE, THAT BASIC SOVIET DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY "IS CORRECT*" AND "WE SHALL CONTINUE FIRMLY TO HOLD TO THIS COURSE*";

-- THE DECISION, APPARENTLY WITHOUT RECENT PRECEDENT, TO ELICIT AND PRINT BIRTHDAY GREETINGS FROM CENTERS OF POLITICAL POWER WITHIN THE USSR CAN ALSO BE SEEN AS A TECHNIQUE FOR BOOSTING LEONID IL'ICH'S PRESTIGE;

-- AND THE UNUSUAL DECISION TO PRESENT HIM WITH A SWORD FOR HIS MILITARY/DEFENSE ROLE COULD HAVE BEEN CAL-

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CULATED TO ENHANCE HIS STANDING IN THAT FIELD.

12. WE DOUBT THAT EMPHASIS UPON THESE THEMES STEMS FROM A PRESENT WEAKNESS IN BREZHNEV'S POSITION WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP. AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION WOULD BE THAT IN ANTICIPATION

OF COMING SUCCESSION-RELATED MANEUVERS, BREZHNEV AND HIS CLOSE SUPPORTERS WANT TO MAKE THE GENERAL SECRETARY AND HIS POLICIES AS NEARLY UNASSAILABLE AS POSSIBLE. THIS HYPOTHESIS IS OF COURSE SPECULATIVE: WE DO NOT KNOW HOW BREZHNEV PERCEIVES HIS OWN POLITICAL FUTURE, OR HIS PHYSICAL HEALTH. NOR DO WE KNOW THE EXTENT OF ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL DIVISIVENESS WITHIN THE LEADERSHIP OVER SUCCESSIONS. BUT BECAUSE THE SURFACE CONTINUITY IN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP PICTURE IS SO BENUMBING, WE BELIEVE THIS HYPOTHESIS SHOULD NOT BE OVERLOOKED AND INDEED SEE SMALL BITS OF EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT IT.

13. FINALLY, IN THE CATEGORY OF MISCELLANY, THE BIRTHDAY FESTIVITIES PRODUCED SEVERAL NOTEWORTHY TIDBITS:

-- BREZHNEV APPARENTLY USES GRECIAN FORMULA 12, OR SOME SOVIET EQUIVALENT, TO DARKEN HIS GREY HAIR; TV FILM OF THEVARIOUS MEDAL PRESENTATION CEREMONIS SHOWED HIS HAIR TO BE ENTIRELY DARK ON ONE OCCASION, PREDOMINANTLY GRAY ON ANOTHER, AND DARK WITH A GRAY STREAK ON YET ANOTHER;

-- CHERNENKO PLAYED A SURPRISINGLY PROMINENT ROLE IN CONNECTION WITH THE VISITS OF CASTRO AND KEKKONEN: CHERNENKO WAS THE ONLY LEADERSHIP MEMBER TO SIT IN ON BREZHNEV'S DECEMBER 15 MEETING WITH CASTRO; AND CHERNENKO WAS THE ONLY NON-POLITBURO MEMBER PRESENT WHEN KEKKONEN PRESENTED BREZHNEV WITH A FINNISH MEDAL (OTHERS ATTENDING WERE GROMYKO, KIRILENKO, KOSYGIN, KULAKOV AND PODGORNYY);

-- TV COVERAGE OF THE MAIN AWARD CEREMONY DECEMBER 19 SHOWED TIKHONOV, WITH A LARGE GRIN ON HIS FACE, BOLDLY
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PUSHING HIS WAY INTO THE POLITBURO SECTION, BETWEEN USTINOV AND KULAKOV;

-- THE EVER-INVENTIVE KOMSOMOL CHIEF TYAZHEL'NIKOV USED THE OCCASION OF KOMSOMOL BIRTHDAY GREETINGS TO BREZHNEV TO ANNOUNCE A NEW KOMSOMOL COMPETITION, THE WINNERS OF WHICH WILL HAVE THEIR PICTURES TAKEN BESIDE THE BATTLESHIP "AURORA"; SECOND AND THIRD PRIZED WERE NOT SPECIFIED.
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Message Attributes

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